



## JAMAICA

30/01 - 04/03/2022



### Port Antonio - 30/01 – 06/02/2022

The distance between Santiago de Cuba and Port Antonio in Jamaica is approximately 120 NM, roughly a 20 hour trip for Monara, and again we are amazed how such a short distance can make such a big difference in language, culture and in music style. We left an island of Son music, Latino's, educated but poor people, government controlled economy, and arrive in the wild world of Rasta, Reggae, Ya Mon (= yes man) and free enterprise.



Monara is almost blown out of the water by the loud Reggae music, originating from three different sound systems, when we arrive in Port Antonio. As it's Sunday, it takes a while to get cleared in by customs, immigration and the ministry of health. Once outside the marina gate we are immersed in a busy town, with a big market where everybody tries to sell you fresh fruit, vegetables, marihuana, cold drinks and Jamaica t-shirts.

The small local supermarket sells all the items we missed so much in Cuba, like Nutella chocolate spread, milk and cookies, and the ice cream shop in the harbour has the best ice cream on the entire island.

The bay of Port Antonio is protected from the elements by Navy Island, once owned by Errol Flynn. When visiting it by dinghy we are accompanied by small sting rays that live in the shallows off the island, and for the first time we are confronted with the lush tropical rainforest that is so typical for North East Jamaica. It



overgrows everything within a few years if not looked after, and houses a large variety of tropical birds and wild animals. Port Antonio averages 3m (!) of rainfall annually, called liquid sunshine in Jamaica, so we get our daily showers, although February is dry season.

Theo, our boat pet, does not like to be left alone on the boat, but is not allowed to go onshore in Jamaica. As we are planning for a few day trips, we have to anchor some 50m out of the marina, to prevent Theo from jumping ship.



We rent a taxi to visit the most famous places. In Boston Bay we find a perfect surf spot and eat jerk chicken prepared over a large wood fire. In Frenchman's cove, a private resort favoured as a holiday destination by Queen Elisabeth, The Beatles and the entire Instagram community, we spend a day on the beach, we visit the Blue Lagoon, made famous by the Brooke Shields movie. With Captain Reebo, we come down the Rio Grande on a bamboo raft, and have lunch at Belinda's, a delicious wood fire restaurant

in the middle of the jungle, where Johnny Depp supposedly got married and Beyoncé occasionally has lunch.

The Portland parish surrounding Port Antonio is a rough hidden gem, explored by the rich and famous over the last century, but not spoilt by mass tourism. As we will see over the next weeks, all the beautiful bays and coves on the Jamaican North and West coast have been flooded by large all-in hotels, flooded by tourists from all over the world, entering on charter flights to Montego Bay.



### **Montego Bay and Negril - 06/02 – 14/02/2022**

In Montego Bay, both our daughter Jeanne and Caroline, Sylvie's sister, arrive on a charter flight from Brussels, and Martha Luna, after 6 months on board, leaves us for a three week spring break in Belgium. Having new guests is always invigorating, Monara gets thoroughly cleaned, we rob the local supermarket for the best products, the galley gets whipped to make the best food, we open the occasional wine bottle and spend long days and nights talking and laughing, trading tales of our adventures for stories from home.



On their first day on the Island, Caroline and Jeanne walk into the first Jamaican tourist trap, gladly followed by Sylvie. They all get braids in their hair, we laugh and joke about it, until we realise that every western woman walks around like that. The next morning the braids are removed...

After three days we move from Montego Bay to Negril. The occasional spliff in the evening, the best beach bar of the area, with Monara anchored 200m off in light blue water, lunch with lobster and a cold Red Stripe beer, and the entire crew goes into holiday mode.



Walking along the famous 7-mile beach in Negril, you come across small eco resorts, shops selling souvenirs, massage salons, all-in hotels, bars and restaurants, each with their own reggae music. The sea is light blue, the beach is white, the occasional sting ray swims along, the water is 30 degrees Celsius, just a bit cooler than the air.



Sitting under a palm tree hiding from the sun, we love to watch the parade of people passing by, and fill in the stories of their lives. Old American tourists, smoking the occasional light joint, the fruit vendor selling pineapples, mangoes and avocado's, the lady offering massages, young couples with children playing in the sand, soaking up the sun, the dusty Rasta beggar smoking all day; we're all in harmony, with all hearts beating that slow reggae rhythm. This is Jamaica at its best, we love it and are grateful to be part of it.



Jeanne, who has to do a Biology and a Chemistry exam in the Belgian embassy in Kingston next week, even finds a spot under her tree to study for a few hours. Meanwhile Caroline manages to get a super sun tan in just one week, and Sylvie gladly follows suit to add a layer.



## Negril – Kingston – 14/02 – 21/02/2022

Caroline has to go back to work, she takes a taxi to the airport and we decide to set sail South. While the stretch from Negril to Kingston seems unattractive on the charts, missing secluded bays and protection which you can find on the Northern shore, we are able to explore some of the wilder and rougher terrain in Jamaica.



In Bluefield Bay some fishermen offer us red snappers as a welcome present, and the local maire comes out on his canoe to bring us cold beers. In Black River a 3.5m crocodile is sunbathing on the river banks, so we decide to leave our inflatable dinghy at home for a local Croc tour through the mangroves. We find shelter from the swell behind Alligator reef and Portland reef, and take Theo to the reef islands for a swim and a run on the beach. We're in no hurry to reach Kingston, as Jeanne has to study for her exams, and we have plenty

of food on board. Along the way, the bright green and blue colours of the Jamaican sea inspire Sylvie to start a new photography project.



## Kingston – 21/02 – 01/03/2022

We anchor outside The Royal Jamaica Yacht Club, a nice marina in the middle of the mangroves. Usain Bolt has his boat here, there is a swimming pool, the bar and restaurant are very good and the manager takes good care of us. It is, however, half an hour drive to Kingston, so we feel a bit trapped.



We visit the famous Coronation market in Kingston, a huge area where, sometimes protected from the sun by tarpaulins, you can find all groceries that can be found on the Island. From here, small busses leave for all corners of Jamaica, loaded with fruits, vegetable and spices. As the market starts at 05.00 in the morning, a lot of vendors take turns napping during the day.

Kingston is the capital of Jamaica, but, in our view, has little to offer for visitors. Apart from the Bob Marley museum and the Coronation market, it lacks some attractions in our opinion.

While Jeanne studies, we prepare for our crossing to Panama, and Leon, Martha Luna and Arne join us from Belgium.

Jamaica is definitely a hidden pearl in the Caribbean, and once you get off the beaten track and away from mass tourism, the vibes, the music, the nice people, the overwhelming nature and the food make for a perfect mix. Thank you for this unexpected adventure!

